



Announcement of Legislative Development

January 2007

Tsunami Warning and Education Act Signed into Law

In December, Congress passed the Tsunami Warning and Education Act, expanding and strengthening U.S. tsunami detection and warning programs. The Act will be implemented by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and carried out by the National Weather Service (NWS). Congress authorized the appropriation of \$159 million over the next five years to fund program activities.

Tsunami Forecasting and Warning Program

The administrator of NOAA will work with the NWS and other NOAA administrative offices to operate the Tsunami Forecasting and Warning Program (Program) for the Pacific and Arctic regions and areas in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico regions determined to be geologically active or to have significant potential for geological activity and pose significant risks of tsunami. Tsunami warning centers will be established in Hawaii, Alaska, and other locations the NWS deems necessary.

The Program will use dynamic technologies and equipment to better detect tsunamis and will use models and measurements, such as inundation models and maps, for tsunami forecasting. As part of the Program, the NWS must work with NOAA to create standards for equipment used to forecast tsunami and maintenance of the equipment must be a top priority. The TsunamiReady program, a NWS initiative designed to educate local emergency management officials and to provide tsunami emergency response plans for communities, will be used to increase community preparedness for tsunamis. The United States Geological Survey and the National Science Foundation will work together with NOAA to gather seismic information from international and domestic seismic networks. The Program will provide the capability to quickly spread warnings to at-risk states and communities in conjunction with existing Federal Warning Systems, including NOAA's Weather Radio All Hazards Program.

The agencies must report to Congress by December 20, 2008, on the integration of the Program with other observation systems and networks. Before December 20, 2009, the agencies must report to Congress on how technology developed under the Tsunami Research Program (below) is being used in the Program. The Comptroller General of the U.S. must submit a report to Congress by January 31, 2010, evaluating the current status of the Program and the Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program and the NWS' ability to continue improving the delivery of the tsunami services. Additionally, NOAA must

contract with the National Academy of Sciences to review the Program, including an assessment of how well the forecast equipment has been integrated into other systems.

National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program

The Act requires NOAA and NWS to create a community-based Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program to improve tsunami preparedness of at-risk areas in the United States and its territories. A coordinating committee made up of federal, state, local, and tribal government officials will make recommendations about the appropriation of funds, provide recommendations to NWS on how to improve TsunamiReady, and ensure that the components of the Mitigation Program are integrated with current plans and programs, including integrating information to help with tsunami evacuation route planning.

Tsunami Research Program

NOAA must work with other agencies and academic institutions, as well as with the hazard mitigation program coordinating committee, to maintain a Tsunami Research Program to develop new technologies for tsunami tracking and numerical forecast modeling. The research program must include social science research to develop and assess community warning, education, and evacuation materials and will ensure that research and findings are available to the scientific community.

Global Tsunami Warning and Mitigation Network

The Act also requires NOAA, in conjunction with NWS and other agencies, to provide technical assistance and training to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the World Meteorological Organization, and other international entities in order to develop a global tsunami forecast and warning system, similar to the International Tsunami Warning System of the Pacific. The agencies must operate an International Tsunami Information Center that will monitor international tsunami warning activities around the world, assist member states in establishing warning systems, maintain a library of knowledge for the scientific community, and disseminate educational materials and research reports. The National Weather Service may provide assistance to nations vulnerable to tsunami in the form of detection equipment, technical advice, and training.

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